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# EDITORIALS

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## CONSERVATIVE COOGLERS

by R. Emmett Tyrrell, Jr.

The announcement of this year's J. Gordon Coogler Awards for the worst books of 1986 is, conservative that I am, heavy labor, relieved solely by the reliable banality of authoress Sally Quinn, whose pedestrian attempt at fiction has assured her a Coogler for worst novel. La Quinn is, as the term is understood in these parts, a liberal. The remaining Coogler and both runners-up are, alas, going to conservatives. This is unusual, for over the years the vast majority of Coogler laureates and runners-up have been liberals, socialists, and worse. Yet conservatives are no longer content with making money and paying the nation's bills. Many now are writing books, and so we see the unhappy consequences: three of the four authors recognized for sins against literature in 1986 are of the right and one is the natural daughter of the President, though also a vegetarian.

In fiction La Quinn's *Regrets Only* takes all cakes. Even if Philip Roth's latest novel had come out in 1986 rather than in early 1987, he would not have preempted her. *Regrets Only* is rubbish of a kind that is unsurpassable. The authoress has only a charwoman's mastery of the English language, no wit and less taste. In the professional judg-

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ment of literary critic Andrew Ferguson [See "Powertown Cupcake," *TAS*, November 1986], *Regrets Only* is unreadable, "windy and empty." These objections are tendered in a constructive spirit; it is to be hoped that Miss Quinn will take them to heart and never again write another novel or despoil any other literary form, for that matter. The runner up for the fiction award goes to *Home Front* by the President's daughter, Miss Patti Davis. One would think that as Commander-in-Chief of our armed forces and an influential figure with the CIA and the FBI, the President could have made some felicitous arrangement to keep *Home Front* out of sight.

This year's Coogler laureate for non-fiction is David Stockman. His grueling *The Triumph of Politics* has just been released in paperback with a spiteful "postscript" in the author's own inimitable style, reemphasizing his basic roguishness. A Professor Louis Filler, compiler of the *Dictionary of American Conservatism*, finished second to Mr. Stockman. This is somewhat surprising, for Professor Filler is apparently a disciple of Dr. Russell Kirk, the eminent antiquarian. Yet the book is disfigured by blunders to the point where it becomes not a reference book at all but a mere rectangle of idiot pulp. Moreover, at times the writing is wholly unintelligible—or is it just me? Read this reference to the scholar

Eric Voegelin and decide for yourself: "He wrote of *Israel and Revelation*, which he saw as 'reduced' by Toynbee and Spengler—who thought man believed because 'he needs' to believe, not because Revelation is true." Or try this: "In famous examples, a feather in a field suggested a bird, on a desk a pen."

Mr. Stockman merits more attention. Of the aforementioned writers he possesses the most talent, but for what? When he began as Ronald Reagan's first director of the Office of Management and Budget, he had forsaken liberalism for neoconservatism and supply-side economics. In 1975 he wrote a very competent essay for Irving Kristol's neoconservative quarterly, *The Public Interest*, wherein he elucidated the difficulty of rendering the U.S. Congress fiscally responsible. The Congress's continued profligacy during his tenure at OMB, however, maddened him. Still more maddening was the President's decision to invigorate the economy with tax cuts whose attendant deficits at least had the benefit of slowing Congress's impulse to spend. Mr. Stockman had decided on a Reagan Administration "frontal assault on the American welfare state," and because the President would not follow his dictates we have now lived through six years of "fiscal disaster." Bask in the disaster.

Mr. Stockman's talent is for delusion. He believes that the world is precisely as he says it is, notwithstanding abundant evidence to the contrary. Thus the embarrassing revelations of this book embarrass only his friends. The ignorant assertions, the vulgarity, the ignoble deeds faze him not at all. In essence Mr. Stockman is the paradigmatic 1960s brat. Dogmatic in his views, he is ceaselessly self-serving in his actions. He is a very good reason for resurrecting the word cad. As a memoir of public service the book is utterly without merit. It reveals no values, only a lack of values. It reveals very little useful information and much

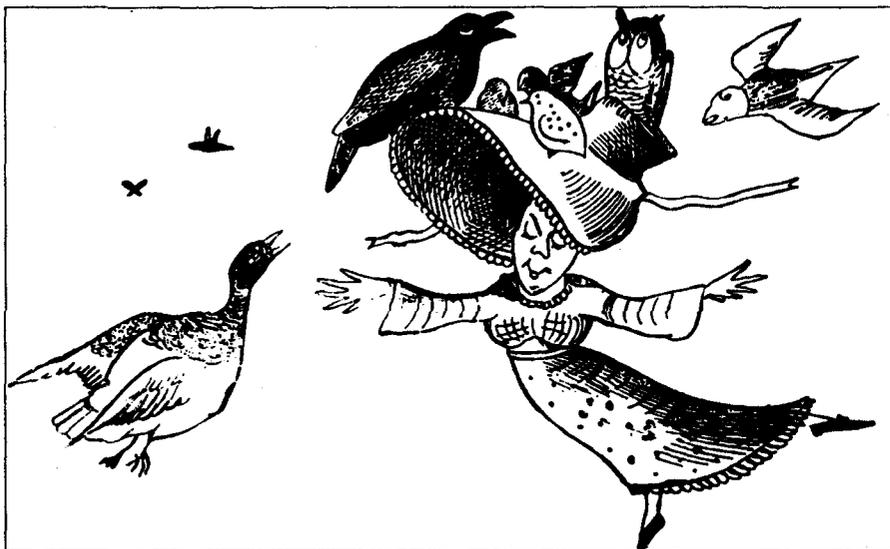
error—Stockman's intellectual idol, Walter Lippmann, was no more the founder of the *New Republic* than Joseph Stalin. As with so many of his fellow 1960s brats, Mr. Stockman is earnest without being serious. What is more, he is an execrable writer.

Having seen the television documentary "The Conservatives," I regret that we award no Cooglers for film. Doing so would emphasize the flaws that crept into much conservative endeavor last year. The film was marked by the same defensiveness, self-regard, fatuousness, and vague anti-intellectualism that has stalked many of us recently. It was solemn to the point of being funereal. It was ill-informed, never explaining how the different elements of libertarianism and neoconservatism found their way into the Reagan coalition. It never bothered to explain how or why conservatives who were so unpopular in 1964 suddenly won the White House in 1980. And it said nothing about the long struggle of the anti-New Left students of the 1960s who today are at the forefront of conservatism in and out of government.

If this small-minded, backward-looking conservatism does not snap out of its cloud of unknowing and face the world as it is today, its contribution to contemporary American political life will be about as substantial as that made by the nudists or the beatniks or the Shakers. At times one suspects that this is about all some conservatives want or expect of themselves. □

## THE DIVER

Your introduction to Sam Hall probably came on Monday, December 15, when it was reported that the Dayton, Ohio furniture salesman had been arrested in Nicaragua on spy charges. My introduction came many years before, on a pool deck in the early 1960s. Hall was then one of the greatest competitive divers in the world, and after winning silver medals in the Pan American Games and the Rome Olympics he had come to dive with the same



team that I swam on, Doc Counsilman and Hobie Billingsley's Indiana University team, probably the best swimming team of all time.

In those days the Indiana team—competing as the Indianapolis Athletic Club in summers and Indiana University in winters—beat the best Olympic teams in the world. Hall had competed for Ohio State University, but upon graduation he joined Indiana's summer program. Silver medals were not to his liking. He was a keen competitor, and in search of the best coaching he moved to Indiana. What brought him to Nicaragua is more complicated.

As an athlete he had been incomparable. He was rated 44th in the nation in the late 1950s but rose to the top in one year. To a particularly exacting sport he brought extraordinary talent, perseverance, and execution under pressure. He was not the kind of vaguely repulsive fellow so many star athletes

turn out to be. To this day former teammates and coaches remember him as being unusually personable. He was the all-American boy, energetic, amusing, vivacious. He did not seem to be complicated or disagreeable. Diving is part sport, part showmanship. Before thousands of people rapt in silent attention one rises from the board, elegantly contorts the body, and drops it into a pool, leaving the surface a sheet of glass. Hall was a stupendous showman.

He was not very political. In the 1960 Olympics a Soviet flag was stolen by members of the American team after an admirable show of fisticuffs. You have my solemn testimony that Hall was not a party to this derring-do. There were some Cold Warriors on that team but Hall was not one of them. The all-American boy, then as now, eschews politics. He is straight, and Hall was very straight. The story is told

about how during the 1959 Pan American Games he eagerly awaited the results of his recently married wife's pregnancy tests. He was elated when the tests showed positive. A month or so later, when his wife had a miscarriage after participating in a baseball game, he divorced her. To his rigid way of thinking it was reckless of his wife to compete in athletics while pregnant. So perhaps the likable Sam Hall was more complicated than he seemed.

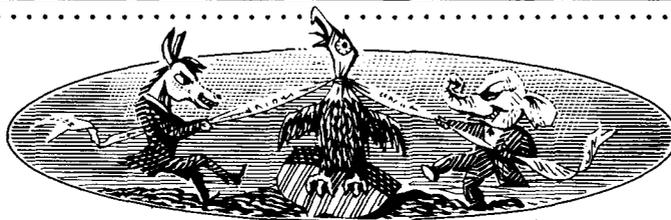
Everyone hangs on his own cross, as the poet says. The life of the accomplished athlete has its many pleasures: victories, travel, fame. But most of all there is the excitement. As the athlete gets older, and if he has any capacity for philosophical reflection whatsoever, he realizes the excitement is the dearest pleasure of sport. It keeps one's mind off life's little puzzles, such

as "what the hell am I doing on this remorseless orb?"

The excitement of sport ended for Hall in the early 1960s. Then he sought other excitement. "He got lost in the shuffle," his old coach Hobie Billingsley reports. Billingsley has coached over 100 national champions and two American Olympic teams. He knows about athletes lost in the shuffle. Hall has wandered through two of the most chaotic decades in American history. The customs and values laid down for the all-American boy of 1960 had changed many by the time Sam Hall re-emerged from the shuffle at Punta Huete on December 15.

Now he had become an anti-Communist mercenary or anti-terrorist or some such fantastico. He claims to have been in Nicaragua as a member of some gimcrack outfit called "the Phoenix Battalion." In 1965 he gave up  
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## CAPITOL IDEAS



### SHEPHERDS IN THE LOCALITY

by Tom Bethell

I went to Midnight Mass at St. Mary's Cathedral in San Francisco—Archbishop John Quinn celebrating. It's one of those ultra-modern structures, as unornamented in its way as a Shaker meeting house; in mood more reminiscent of a U.N. building than a cathedral. The symbols of Roman Catholicism were quite inconspicuous. There was conversation and even some laughter in the huge congregation, seated as though at a concert. A harpist in a red evening dress struck a seasonal medley for openers.

According to the latest translation of St. Luke's gospel, read from the lectern on this Christmas night, "There were shepherds in the locality."

This struck me as demolition masquerading as translation. What has been gained by the removal of "abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night"?

Excerpts from the Archbishop's homily: Jesus was "born in exile," a "refugee." He is, therefore, "margin-

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alized, and poor." And so he "identifies himself with all those who are poor, marginalized, refugees—exiles." He added to the list, as though almost forgetting: "And cripples."

"Is this what we see when we see the marginalized, the poor, the homeless, and the powerless around us?" Archbishop Quinn went on. Around me was a large, evidently prosperous, non-marginalized, non-refugee, middle-class congregation, sitting patiently in the vast, circular, somewhat drafty, raw-concrete-and-glass, U.N.-like cathedral.

The shepherds, too, were marginalized—"considered outcasts at that time."

Well, maybe. But what about the good shepherds?

A few days later I went to the church of the Most Holy Redeemer, in the Castro district of San Francisco. This area is much frequented by homosexuals, who according to one estimate may comprise as much as 25 percent of the city's population. More than 1600 San Franciscans, many of them from the Castro area, have

died of AIDS. I had heard that the church was opening a hospice, and according to a brochure in the back of the church, Hospice of San Francisco "is converting the Convent of the Most Holy Redeemer Church into a residential hospice facility housing 15 people."

*What Will the Program Be Like:* The basic services to be provided in the hospice residence are safe and healthful living accommodations, personal assistance and care, supervision and observation, food and laundry service, plus the hospice services usually provided in the home by Hospice of San Francisco: nursing, social work and volunteer support. Family and friends will be encouraged to spend time with their loved ones. Activities suitable to the individual's needs will be provided, including art, music, literature, meditation and spiritual services.

Not much about religion here. Perhaps it can be smuggled in if it's among "the individual's needs."

A priest in San Francisco told me that the Theology Department of a Catholic college in the Bay area recently hired a witch as an assistant theologian. I can believe this. A few years ago I would have assumed this was hyperbole, but now I take it literally. I mean,

there are people who call themselves witches (they even have witches' conventions), and they have a disconcerting way of acting like witches. Why not take them at their word?

In her beautifully written book, *The Desolate City: Revolution in the Catholic Church*, just published by Harper & Row, Anne Roche Muggeridge touches on this subject in the following arresting passage:

Before Vatican II, nuns were totally committed to the traditional eschatological world view. I remember with awe from my several years as a novice in a religious order the intensity of their sublimation of natural maternal yearnings, and the energy and passion it lent to the work of the Church. The shock of the revolution was too much for many of them to bear. Their souls became like the empty houses into which wandering devils enter and dwell. There is a real stink of brimstone at gatherings dominated by feminist nuns, especially at their liturgies, a creepy neo-paganism with strong suggestions of sexual perversion.

Anne Roche's husband, John, is the son of Malcolm Muggeridge, and her book, suitably tinged with the characteristic Muggeridgean pessimism, is one that he might have been proud to